JUST AS
WE WERE

By Aggie

BY
AGNES HALVERSON HILMEN

(NOW)
MRS. I. A. HAATVEDT

[booklet written most likely between 1950 and her death in 1959]

Dedicated to the memory
of
those early pioneers and staunch Christians
my parents

ANDREAS and ELIN HALVERSON

WISCONSIN CALLS!

Come on up here in Springtime, To Wisconsin in the leaftime,
When trout are rising fast and free; To Fairyland in Maytime.
To enjoy the peaceful pastime
By rippling stream and whispering tree. Come on up here for playtime,
In the balmy days of Junetime.
Where clover sweetly scents the air; To "Land o' Lakes" in haytime,
To forget your irksome work time And quickly lose your blues and care. Come on up for a cool time,
When in "dog days" sultry heat time Your strength and pep fade fast away; Hike to Wisconsin's health clime,
For a glorious, glad and gay time In "Cloverland" for rest and play!

(By Dr. A. S. Alexander of the Wisconsin College of Agriculture, who has penned these sincere words of praise. Gratitude is expressed to his son, Mr. J. H. H. Alexander for permission to use these lines.)

The Thought

This, then, was the home state of the Halverson family! It was no thought of mine to write of the early days, of childhood, of school days and of the old home so dear to us. But as we watch the years slip away, and are made aware of the flight of time, we watch the sunset more often (I have watched the sun drop behind the rim of the beautiful blue Pacific) and so our thoughts travel backward and we live again those early days. My interested listeners were the children, hearing me tell of those days, incidents so clear in my memory, some sad, some merry. Then the clamoring urge began, "Mother, write it down, please write it down, and we will take care of the rest." I think Orrin was the first one to voice this and somehow the urge persisted.

Not at once did I begin to assemble this material, becanse of other duties, but the idea had taken root in my mind and heart, and so I began, in my own way, with the poem our cousin Louisa had sent me, years ago. How we loved this familiar farm place in Eastern Wisconsin, about seven miles from Lake Michigan.

School We saw no trains, we heard no train whistles, and we walked the one and a quarter miles, in winter, to the village school at Mishicot, carrying our lunch pails, and, not the least important, our heavy school bags. They held slates and books, our slates were the double ones, marked off carefully inside for our arithmetic problems, and our precious slate pencils, beautifully striped, inside.

In the early morning, we could sometimes hear sleigh-bells, and the tramp of heavy hoofs; here was a chance to ride, up onto the logs which stretched far behind. This might have been a dangerous practice, but no one ever was injured, and it shortened our trip to school.

And now, while I, Aggie, am speaking of logs! These were unloaded in the river above the dam, waiting for release to go over the dam. They lay in the water until spring. The river carried a wealth of logs from the Wisconsin forests to the mills.

Anna

It was during the school noon hour that Anna Zander, friend, schoolmate, and seat-mate, and I conceived the idea of going down to the river to leap from log to log as they bobbed around in the deep water. What fun it was. We never fell in, no one else tried it, only the two girls who did not want to grow up to be young ladies! Who dressed alike in sailor suits, wore Fedora hats, and played ball. Anna had a boy's technique in pitching a ball, something I always admired. I was left-handed, but I could catch the ball!

Yes, we sat together in school, wept when we sang "Old Black Joe," "Narragansett Bay," and numerous other songs that had sad endings! We also wept when the last day of school was drawing near and our teachers were making their farewell speeches.

By candlelight, we studied in her room in her home, for the examinations. They were to be held at Two Rivers, on Lake Michigan. She lived in the village near our school, which was a convenience in studying together.

Then Mother, about this time, made a surprising statement. She said our teacher, Floyd Westgate, a man whom we knew well, in fact, a son of one of our neighbors, had complained about our appearance! We would have to dress more grown up if we wished to get Teacher's Certificates and a nine-month school. Our hair, worn in one braid and looped up under a bow of ribbon, would have to be "put up," our dresses lengthened. I suppose our mothers had to contrive something. By the way, these mothers scarcely knew each other! I believe I took to wearing Mother's high shoes, the size did not matter. Anna and I usually had worn tan moccasins to school. Of course I must have worn real shoes to church but perhaps Mother's were newer and more shiny.

We had no hairpins so we practiced putting up our hair using long smooth nails. The morning of Examination Day came. After an early breakfast at Anna's consisting of dark rye bread, very good, coffee and summer sausage, we were off in the early dawn driving a horse and buggy. We were to reach the small beautiful city of Two Rivers by nine o'clock. Shivering with mingled emotions when Lake Michigan was in sight we entered the city. Anna had relatives there who were very kind to us. We were directed to the school building where the examinations were held. On the way, looking into shop windows, how wonderful to see a higher grade of candy displayed, rich looking creams! At home, in our village, we usually ate penny Stang candy. Perhaps, since then, my favorite candy has been cream candy, as my children very well know!

Our new surroundings were a rather disturbing experience, but we settled down. This was not an ordinary home school weekly or monthly examination. Bravely we set to work and the results were good. We passed! However, we decided to go on to school one more year, then examinations again and we were really launched as teachers! We taught a few years and were married the same year, in 1894. During the vacation period in 1893 I visited the World's Fair in Chicago. The older sisters lived there and August was there also. Many, many years have passed since then, over fifty-five. Anna and I still keep in touch with each other but lately her hands have given her trouble. Those sturdy fine hands I remember so well. Some time ago, the year

1944, Clarine and I, on our return trip from the East, under Virginia skies, having visited our sons, stopped at the old home with Louisa at Mishicot, and with Anna at Manitowoc. Anna lived there with a daughter. She said, holding my hands, "It's Aggie Halverson!" and Clarine said, on being introduced, "'We have known you all our lives!" A timely thought.

Letters

I am recalling a letter Anna once wrote me through the years, saying, "Do you remember the little red velvet pants you and I made together for my boy Maxie and your boy Orrin?" And further, "One day we drove out from Mishicot. I shot glances from right to left and then we came to your road. Someone said, 'Oh, the old Halverson road' and we looked up the road to Aggie's home and the big hill." This hill was called the "Shooting Hall" hill. Anna wrote inquiring about Gustave, adding, " 'Mid the Green Fields of Virginia-." She remembered our singing it and loved to listen.

And after a long interval she wrote, "Let me know you still are living and occasionally think of me. Remember, my dear, often and often I think of you and hope we may meet again. Do you still sing, 'The Night Shades Are Falling'?" In another of her letters, "Weren't we the champion log runners? When I see pictures in the movies of log jams, I say, 'Oh, look, there are Aggie and I.' "

The River

At the foot of our strawberry hill, ran the Mishicot river, in and out, past the woodsy banks to the village. In the wintertime we used our sleds to and from school traveling on the ice. I remember our teacher had moved with his Mother to the village and I can still see the glint of the sun's rays on the skates he carried, coming down to the river to accompany us part way home.

In the summer time there was fishing and boating on this same river and singing as the boat moved along in the moonlight. It was the most natural thing for some one to start a song, then the others joined in. "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny," with Gustave's deep bass voice lending the harmony we loved and enjoyed so much.

Fishing

Our fishing consisted in digging angleworms for bait, filling a small can with them, taking our fish poles, walking through the fields down to the river, and bringing home enough fish for supper. They were not very large and we had to clean them ourselves, standing around a platform that Father had built under the revolving clotheslines. Needless to say, we had eaten a great many chokecherries on this trip, an abundance of them being within reach, during the fishing. Mother would not permit us to drink milk after eating chokecherries. There was danger of choking, she said.

The Strawberry Hill

(Called sometimes The Daisy Hill)

The very smell now, of a strawberry, brings back the smell of those wild strawberries! And along the river, on our side, let me name the things we ate from bushes and trees: hazelnuts, beechnuts, wild plums, nannyberries, chokecherries, gooseberries, highbush huckleberries, and thorn apples. Back from this was our field of buckwheat and on a still day from the top of the berry hill we could hear the buzzing of bees over the buckwheat.

We kept a youth magazine at home, called "Golden Days." Melvin said, many years later, "I believe I could still find shreds of 'Golden Days' down there. I used to take a copy along to read while watching the cows!"

Haying

On either side of the berry hill were deep valleys. Here, in almost constant shade, grew the wild flowers we loved and really studied. Botany had been taken up in school, something new and interesting. There were buttercups, anemones, forget-me-nots, adder's tongues, spring beauties and hepaticas, and a heavy growth of fern which favored shade. Wherever possible, Father cut with a scythe the grass which grew here so abundantly. And we girls, Julia and I, followed after with rakes to spread this grass for hay. The job we did not like was when this hay had grown damp and Father would say, 'Now we must turn the hay.' Then the final raking up into haycocks, all along, on the floor of the valley. I can still see the hayrack and team moving from haycock to haycock and we girls "raking after." Following with every spear of hay, reaching up, and emptying the rakings on top of the load. Julia and I did not want our hands and arms to get tanned, so we drew on long black stockings with feet cut off, and quite often, as we worked, we drew these down to see if our skin had improved any.

Berrying

Dividing many of the fields and farms were stump fences and here grew in profusion the berry bushes from which we picked raspberries, blackberries and blackcaps or black raspberries. About midafternoon on a day that Mother had planned raspberry shortcake for supper, we would set out with our berry pails. Over the bridge which was built solidly of logs, no water running, and soon we were climbing over the stumps filling our berry pails. I recall that the shortcake was our supper, baked in long bread tins. Mother must have had the cook stove oven all ready.

Now, coming home, and knowing we would soon have to bring the cows home, we settled down on the bridge, set our berry pails safely to one side, and waited to see the first Daddy-long-legs coming daintily along a smooth log for his afternoon outing. We hovered around, stopped his walk and said, "Grandfather, grandfather, where are my cows? If you don't tell me, I'll k-i-1-1 you!" And whichever direction a long leg pointed we firmly believed "that is where the cows are." That being settled we proceeded homeward with our berries and Daddy-long-legs went on his way.

The Summer Shanty

We always entered the summer shanty first; a long building extending from the kitchen door of the main house. There was a brief platform from this door to the shanty. On the edge of this platform Father had cut a V so the boots were very easily pulled off. How glad we were when the warm weather came and we could move out to the shanty. We cooked there and ate our meals at a long table which Father had made, also sat on a long bench along the wall which he had made. He had also built the flour bin, the work table, the wood box and long shelves above, which held all a pantry usually carries; all that was needed. At the other end of the shanty were grain bins and all around were the usual household necessities. I remember, that outside, along a sunny wall, was a long wide shelf on which the milk pans and milk pails were turned toward the sun all day. There were no cream separators in those days. Hop vines climbed up over the shanty from which Mother made yeast.

Churning

At about five in the afternoon, we began the task of carrying up, from the cellar, the heavy milk pans for the skimming of the cream. The milk had soured, which was as it should be; and sometimes we were permitted to sprinkle sugar on part of the cream and eat it well mixed with thick milk. To this day I love it! Father liked the sour milk, the plain foods and "gammelost," [a pungent Norwegian cheese] which Mother made and usually had on hand for him.

I remember the tall wooden churn with the dasher. We all had to take turns at the churning using the counting method. I can see Father coming in, tired perhaps, from some outside work, but drawing up a chair to the churn to take his turn too, with the dasher. He could tell by unmistakable sounds that the churning would soon be over and he would look toward Mother and say, "Du faar stryge ned," which meant she must scrape the cream down from the sides so that all would be incorporated. Soon there was a golden lump and Mother took over.

Cleaning

We used only steel knives and forks and we kept them shiny with scouring brick. A bar would last a long time. For convenience, Father had fashioned out of a sturdy board about twenty inches long and six inches wide, a place on which to do the scouring, with a box-like enclosure at the end to hold the brick. At the other end of the board he had bored a hole so that we could hang it up on a nail. This hung between the studs of the shanty wall. We scrubbed that big shanty floor with a broom, using soft soap which Mother had made outside, in a huge kettle having saved all the wood ashes.

Agnes, Julia, Dora

The shanty had been put up for the family to live in while the big house was being built. Dora was born there in 1876. I was then four years old and Julia was two. Father had a song for Julia, who was very fair haired; it was about her silky hair and her sweetness.

The Wood Shed

The memories that are closely associated with that long building called "The Summer Shanty." Next to that was the wood shed. Melvin's memory carries him back to the days when a chicken head usually lay beside the “huggestab" or chopping block and to Uncle Reinert, Father's brother, chopping wood. Wise conversations were carried on between nephew and uncle, while Melvin awaited the chance to throw an apple at him and heard finally, "Ut med dig," meaning "Out you go," or "Out with you!" Uncle Reinert had come over from Norway more recently, lived with us, and worked around. By trade, he was a shoemaker. His temper was somewhat short, but, on the whole, he was warmly interested in all we did, especially our school achievements. He used to stand back of my chair while I wrote and say, "Nei, for en skribent!" He was simply admiring the racing of the pen over the paper.

Weaving

A carpet loom was set up in that shanty. Mother wove carpets, Father helping her with whatever she undertook to do. In the winter, when the snow drifts prevented our getting to school, we sat and sewed carpet rags. These carpets were woven in strips and the strips sewed together. Our carpets stretched from wall to wall, fastened down with carpet tacks. When, in the spring, these carpets were laid over a covering of clean straw, we felt it was real luxury to walk over them. I have a recollection of seeing Mother make candles, tallow candles, which was the light we used.

The Civil War

I can see Father's blue army coat with the brass buttons and the army cap hanging high up beside the studs in the shanty. Most wonderful of all things to remember! Father was a Civil War veteran and was in the 44th Wisconsin Regiment under General Thomas. As we think back, we may wonder why we did not save that blue coat but, no doubt, Mother, in time, made use of it by cutting it up for small clothes. There were the first four girls in the family when Father was drafted into the army: Martha; Tilla, Minnie and Hannah. I have heard it said that Father came in one day and said, "Well, I'm drafted." And Mother had answered, "As God wills."

They had taken in a homeless young lad who was a great help at this time, while Mother was alone. The cows in those days strayed in the woods, and only the tinkle of the cowbells gave evidence of where they were to be found. Father and Mother had seen to it that this boy was instructed in the Lutheran faith and later confirmed. August was born while Father was in the army. This was in the year 1865. The first home that the family lived in was over and away from the traveled road at the top of the berry hill overlooking the river. Here the four older daughters were born. August came next, then two brothers who died in early childhood, first one, then the other, each one having been named George. Then came Gustave, Agnes and Julia. The new house was now being built by the side of the traveled road. And here, after Dora came Alma, Melvin and Leila. I remember that one winter Mother achieved the heroic task of sending seven of us to school every day! Lunch pails, heavy mittens and stockings, warm hoods. The emptiness

of the house must have been a relief for a while. But by four-thirty o'clock Mother was looking for her brood with hot soup on the stove and dry clothing ready, if needed. How did she do it? Only such a Mother could tell you! Quiet, restrained in her emotions, severe in discipline, with a deep spiritual faith, she, like other pioneer women, had learned everything the hard way. Coming to America from Norway in her eighteenth year, and learning the English language while working in American homes. She met Father, several years older than she, in America. The two were married and established a Christian home, their faith shining through all the vicissitudes of life; a heritage to us, so wonderful and glorious. I find myself inadequate to express what it has meant to us all.

The Home

To resume the memories of our house, our home. There was a porch along the length of the house. Two doors led into the house from this porch. One into the parlor proper, the other into the sitting room. These two rooms were quite large with connecting double doors which, in summer, were kept open giving an air of spaciousness. Here was the old organ. As Melvin wrote many years later, "What a wonderful instrument I once thought it was, and you, Aggie, the most wonderful player, although I have heard better players since!" I did not take music lessons but I loved to play by ear and Father liked that. As he sang songs from Norway or hummed marches I tried to follow him and soon I could carry through. Especially one, a Norwegian wedding march! He sang a great deal in the home with children on his knee, one on each knee. These songs he sang in the Norwegian language and we understood. For of course our religious instruction was carried on entirely in the Norwegian language and in the same manner we learned our hymns and prayers. Our parents both spoke English very well.

Dora, however, had music lessons and soon we thought she could master anything. She, also, taught in the public schools, as did Melvin and Leila in the early years. Alma was the "little maid" at home, the all-round helper, Mother's right hand when we left home to follow our chosen work. Gustave was Father's right hand and we too grew up together. Julia was the faithful dressmaker. She excelled in different kinds of sewing. Our school dresses were made by her, as well as the best dresses we wore.

The Organ

After a while there was a piano in the house but the old organ had its own particular corner. It had two small shelves on which we would set vases filled with flowers in blossom time. When the last of the Halversons moved to North Dakota the organ was left in the old home. We presume that it stood there for years. Then we tried to get in touch with the family there but the organ was no more.

Picture of Father

As the pictures, one by one, pass before the mind's eye, here is one, the memory of which will always remain with us. And so I must write it down. It was Decoration Day as we called it then. There was to be a celebration in the village; there was to be a band, the school children were to march and the veterans of the Civil War were to march in a body. Father willingly consented to come with us for was he not going to hear martial music played by the band? And was he not going to march again? As we stood waiting for the procession we knew that truly this was real to him. I can still see him in his long-tailed coat, black felt hat, his musket over his shoulder like the soldier that he was. His eyes set straight ahead—marching. But what was the matter with our own eyes? We could not see for tears.

The Apple Orchard

Along the path from the house to the barnyard bordered with crabapple trees Father had built a summer house, octagon shaped, of laths. The crabapples were the Hyslop, a winter crabapple, and the yellow Transcendant. Grape vines covered the summer house. It was a shady place with seats inside all around and a center table. As the vines matured we enjoyed grapes. Close to this grew the large Duchess of Oldenberg apple tree. I can still hear the thud of the ripe apples on the ground during a rain and wind storm. These apples were no keepers so we gathered them and they were converted into dried apples for winter use. Mother spread the slices on a flat surface outside in the sun, covered with mosquito netting. When they were curled up and dry she stored them in sacks and hung them away. And let me say that to us the Duchess apple is the apple supreme for all purposes.

Perhaps we are prejudiced in its favor but through the years the very smell of this apple brings me back to that old orchard. I have seen Leila snatch one up and hold it to her nose as if it were something precious, as indeed it was. She was back home again!

Geese and Sheep

Mother had a board enclosure out in the orchard under the cherry trees. Here were kept the geese and their young. Sometimes the tender little goslings escaped from under the enclosure and if there was a sign of rain I can still see Mother hurrying around gathering them up in her apron. They could not survive a wetting. From these, then, came the wonderful goose feathers for our pillows, some of which we still have. We also kept just enough sheep to furnish the wool for clothing. After the sheep shearing and the washing and carding of the wool, by the magic of tools and machinery and her own hands, Mother brought the wool to the yarn stage. Then came the knitting of countless mittens and stockings and socks. Sitting at her spinning wheel, I can see her still. The yarn stage was being reached. She sang, in her clear soprano, a hymn or two. Then a thought might have come to her - she gave a command, "Bring your book and I will hear your lesson!" The Commandments, the Creed. We held the book and the spinning went on.

Picture of Mother

I have mentioned the knitting. Mother stood knitting while watching the kettles on the stove and you could see her in a dusky corner knitting in the dark. Walking around outside with Father looking at the growing things, her hands busily knitting. When she had reached the thumb stage with the mittens she tried them on our hands.

Auntie and Uncle

The family closest to the Halversons during all these years was that of Uncle and Auntie. She was Mother's sister and the only two of their family to come to America. So these two families, Mother's and Auntie's, were very close and a strong affection existed among the cousins. Uncle and Auntie had also had quite a large family but the terrible epidemic, Black Diphtheria, had swept through the country and three of their children had died in nine days. We have been told that at each death Uncle came on snowshoes to our home for Father to make the little caskets. One of our George's also died of the scourge.

[Note- The uncle and aunt were likely Lars Olsen and wife Mary who lived right across the street from the Jambo Creek church. Records show the deaths of three children in 1870.]

The Farm

Father and Uncle were essentially farmers but on the side Father was a carpenter and Uncle was a blacksmith. To complete the picture of our home farm; there were forty acres in all. Farther away, past other farms, Father had bought a piece of pasture land, twenty acres, which was designated as "Op paa landet." We gave it a literal translation, "Up on the land," and it was called that ever after. Barefooted, up the sandy road, we would go for the cows kept in this pasture. I can still see the "bell cow" leading the rest coming toward us near milking time. We let down the bars and they stepped through in dignified, Ladylike fashion. After a while a part of this "land" was fenced off and cultivated.

Father was away from home at intervals working in the shipyards at Port Washington. Indians often were seen and stopped at the homes; but Mother has told us that they were friendly, due, no doubt, to the fact that they were never turned away from a home empty-handed.

Neighbors

We had no neighbors of our own nationality. There was the French settlement of Swiss French, a quiet, peaceable people. Many German and Bohemian families raised their children in this community and they were our schoolmates. Three miles away our church steeple reared its head, the church built by Father. The brick parsonage; surrounded by trees, is still there. Here, many a game of croquet was played by us. Hilmens lived near [author's eventual spouse], as did Uncle and Auntie. It was a simple matter for these boys to cross over into the woods and cut down a stately Christmas tree for our church Christmas festival, and for all of us to gather in the church to make wreaths to hang over the windows.

Louisa

Our dearest memories of those days were closely associated with Louisa [Larsen], our only girl cousin. Our happiest anticipations were fulfilled when she could visit us, or when we could be with her in her home. That spacious log house, the air of which brought to mind sweet clover, a decoration which Auntie must have loved. This is where Auntie, after we had all gone to bed, rolled out her famous thin sugar cookies. I can still hear her soft, heavy footsteps back and forth on the floor of the big room downstairs. Warmth flooded us when we came in through her door. Years later, she was getting supper for a son coming home, with Uncle sitting near talking to her. Before his eyes she suddenly swayed and fell. Auntie, who had been with us forever, was gone. When, on a Saturday afternoon, our work done, Julia and I happily got ready to "go to Auntie's" our joy knew no bounds. We walked, on the well-known trails, along fences, through woods and fields, passing the Hilmen place. Finally reaching the tamarack swamp rich with heavy green moss into which our feet sank. In the moss we found wintergreen, the shiny dark green leaves so tender and tasty for eating, and, best of all, the wintergreen red berry. We stopped here to eat of this luxury underfoot, not forgetting tamarack gum to chew which clung to the bark of the trees. By this time we were ready to go on and soon came in sight of the small fields where blackberries grew in the fence corners. One glance toward the log house-a flying figure emerged and here was Louisa waving and calling. We had come to stay overnight!

The two boys, Ludy and Ed, came to our place in like manner, joyously, to visit Melvin, all of an age. Melvin would be invisible at first but was finally discovered behind the kitchen door standing on his head -such was his joy!

Many years later Louisa wrote of one of our schoolmates saying to her (Isabel Trossen), "The Halverson girls were always so glad when you were to come, the Queen of England could not have been made more welcome!" and Louisa's answer, "Yes, I was the same when they came, I could never wait until they got to the house, I had to run and meet them."

It Was Time for the Sap to Run

I have mentioned the Swiss French people. One of these families lived not far away and they owned a fine stand of maple trees. Late in March they would invite us to come over; the trees were to be tapped. The sap was running from an opening down into wooden troughs, one for each tree. The huge iron kettle with the fire built underneath was ready for the sap, which was brought from the troughs. This was to be boiled down to pure maple syrup and it was stirred constantly. The scene must have resembled a camp fire at night with figures moving about and all this sweetness being boiled down and tasted. It is a vague picture in my mind but I can still see that fire light. To the oldest member of that kindly family who could speak no English and called Mother "Madame Andrew," was relegated the task of bringing a portion of the syrup to its most wonderful stage of perfection and goodness, maple sugar! In a few days she would come over and, from the capacious pocket of that full skirt came maple sugar cakes which she handed out to each one of us!

The First Grandchild

The first grandchild our parents had was Clarence Hearley, Tillie's son. How we welcomed that little boy every summer from Chicago! Once his Mother brought him home dressed like "Little Lord Fauntleroy." I shall never forget that.

The "Balm of Gilead" Tree

This friendly tree with its shady branches stood some distance away from Auntie's house. The only name the tree knew, however, was Bomb-gallion! "Let's take our work and sit under the Bomb-gallion tree!" A wild plum tree nearby furnished us with plums which we ate while they were still green and hard, dipped in salt. We also had rhubarb dipped in salt and ate gustily.

The Sleeping Bench

Father had made it. You could pull it out; then it was a bed and held three little girls nicely. The picture I have in my mind is Father beside us, at bedtime, helping us to say our prayers. I can even remember the words he used, simpler ones, so that they were easier for us to understand. This bench provided a long seat in the daytime.

The Skiing Party

I am sure that my readers will bear with me when I say that I cannot refrain from writing down, in Louisa's own words, a part of a letter written to me after we had moved away from Wisconsin. At this time we had reached the age of very young ladyhood, with no thought of becoming a part of the social life. Here it is: "One Saturday evening you came up to stay overnight. You had seen Otto Hilmen over near Jukams, the parsonage, and he had said, 'What shall we do this evening?' You answered, 'What could be more fun than to slide down hill?' Of course that meant Jule and me too. So, after supper, there they came, in the moonlight. They did not come in, just whistled. Mother said, 'Who's that?' You walked slowly over to the window and said, 'Why, it's Julius and Otto!' But we knew what to do. We got hastily into our coats, found hoods and mittens and away we went, followed by Major, the dog. I sat on Jule's sled, you on Otto's. I can see that long fine sled. What a hero I thought Jule was becanse he could guide it so well, dodging all the snags and stumps below that hill. After going up and down several times, and it was getting to be rather a tame affair, we noticed, a little farther on, a very steep hill, almost straight up! We decided to try it, but on the snowshoes. Otto went home and got the skis, all four of us on the pair. All went well for a while, then the toe of one struck something and we were thrown. How we laughed, we were snow men! When Julius finally dug himself out I said, 'That hill is too steep, isn't it, Julius?' His answer, 'Yes, 'tis,' became a slogan. It was then that we thought the first hill was good enough. We were almost frozen when we got home but soon warmed up, and to bed and in dreamland."

Christmas in the Old Home

Father, in his quiet way, and while we were away in school took his axe to a woodsy spot on our farm to locate and cut down a Christmas tree. This he carried home and set up in the shut-off parlor. We knew nothing of the mysterious happenings in there but, no doubt, we went about with expectant faces and joyous anticipation. Toward the end of the day, Christmas Eve, while Mother was preparing the festive dish, a porridge made of cream, milk and rice which constituted supper, Father must contribute his part toward the festivities. He must carry out a tradition which we liked to think he had brought with him from Norway. As the dusk deepened, he came in quietly and said, while we waited with bated breath, "I believe I hear the jingle of the sleigh bells and the reindeer will soon come galloping up through the woods behind the barn with 'Julebuk' (Santa) driving. He will be hungry so I shall set my plate of porridge, with a spoon, out on the front porch so he can eat what he wishes of it. I think that would be a nice thing to do." Mother glanced at Father for she knew all about this and he carried his porridge out and came in again. After a while, he went out again quietly and brought in the plate of porridge, partly eaten. We wondered, was this a tradition he had brought from Norway? If so, we thought it a beautiful one. Soon it was time for those double doors to be swung open. And when the great moment came and the tall, lighted tree stood there before us, we thought it the most beautiful thing we had ever seen. The real significance of Christmas was observed just before bedtime when we all stood around and sang "Glade jul" (Silent Night) and Father read aloud the Message.

Christmas Morning

A festive air prevailed and a more festive breakfast than usual was ready for us, Father leading in singing of a hymn. If there were services in our church that day, our pastor having several congregations, the team of horses, Dick and Blaine, hitched to the bob sleigh, carried us the three miles to the church. No doubt one had to stay at home to watch the sausages and spare ribs for our Christmas dinner. If there were no church services, we all had to settle down, after the morning work was done, and here was carried out a Christmas service at home. Father at the table with the huge "Postil" before him and the hymn books lying ready. Oh, the memories of those beautiful observances!

The Church Within Our House

Has He not said, 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"? Children must be canght the truths by word and example. Home has the first and most responsible place in character building. Under the influence of parents during childhood, the deepest and most lasting impressions are made on the child's receptive mind and heart. When parents have these spiritual convictions, how fortunate the child! So often in our thinking of the early days of our church in America, we see the founders as old men and women. But they were not. Some of them, pioneering in the new land, were scarcely out of their teens. They gave the strength and enthusiasm of youth.

The "Klokker" (Song Leader)

I have said that Father was a carpenter. The church was built by him, also the pulpit. No doubt he made the two small blackboards on which he wrote the hymn numbers which the minister handed to him. For Father was the Klokker. For as many years as I can remember he led the singing of our beloved Lutheran hymns; we loved them from hearing Mother singing them while about her daily tasks, as did Auntie in her home. I can never remember, all through childhood, and even later, much later, Father sitting with us in the pew, with Mother and the row of children. No, he was up there next to the minister. We can see him yet, using a tiny piece of chalk, to mark down the numbers, using his handkerchief to rub out the former numbers. Once, I remember, I sat with Evelyn, my first baby, on my lap and he came down for a moment before the service to sit down beside me and to hold her on his knee, only for a moment.

The only time we felt uneasy, and Mother especially so, was when an old man across the aisle dragged out the lines of the hymn and Father gave him a baleful glance over his glasses. Mother's task was to see to it that we sat in orderly fashion and to encourage us to join in the singing. "Syng til Guds ære," she said, "Sing to the glory of God."

After the Church Services

And outside, on a warm summer day, we gathered in the church yard. Here were Uncle and Auntie, Louisa and the boys, and our friends. We watched Mother's face. Would she say "yes" or "no" to Auntie's invitation to "Come over"? Happiness flooded every face when, after some hesitation, she said "Yes"!

When there was an offering in church, on the festival Sundays, Father's offering was handed out in the form of small coins to the children standing around him. The balance was deposited in a cup in the cupboard at home.

The Church

When we go home we never fail to visit the old church which has a beautiful location and would be seen for a long distance were it not for the woodsy parts of Wisconsin. Another church body is using it now and if the doors are locked we manage to climb up so that we can look in the windows and see the old familiar pews, the spot where Father stood and the altar where we made our Confirmation vows. Father's grave is close by; the U. S. government has placed a monument there with the Civil War inscriptions. Mother did not wish to leave Wisconsin, but, with members of the family, she too migrated to this state, North Dakota. Here she died in 1916 and here is her grave. When the question came up, among her children, as to her place of burial, we remembered her own spoken words: "It matters not where you lay me, I shall be with Father."